¶1. (U) Official results trickling in from the December 12 municipal elections seem to confirm early speculation that the President's TIM party won throughout most of the country, with the exception of a spectacular defeat in Antananarivo (Reftel). Businessman and political unknown Andry "TGV" Rajoelina beat TIM incumbent Hery Rafalimanana in Antananarivo with 63.27 percent of the vote. Although reliable statistics are not yet available, independent candidates had a relatively strong showing. Approximately half of the new mayors who ran as independents hail originally from the TIM party.

¶2. (U) Despite fears to the contrary, President Ravalomanana and his party are taking their defeat in Antananarivo gracefully. Calling TIM's loss evidence that democracy is alive and healthy in Madagascar, President Ravalomanana has publicly said he is ready and willing to work with all the new mayors. TIM President and Minister of Decentralization Yvan Randriasandratriniony acknowledged in a press conference the message sent by Antananarivo voters and said the party would take the necessary measures to remedy the situation. Partially blaming the long-term absence of a secretary general for the defeat, the TIM President named Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry Ivohasina Razafimahefa (a close Embassy contact) the new Secretary General of TIM. In a comment indicating he will continue

SIPDIS
forging ahead with development on his own terms, President Ravalomanana less tactfully told journalists, "I could care less about the people's message. Whether the people are satisfied or not, it is not my problem. I am not looking to satisfy the people, I want what is good for them."

¶3. (U) Andry Rajoelina is wisely auditing the mayor's office to ensure everything is "clean" before he fully assumes his position as the new mayor of Antananarivo. In a press conference aired on his privately-owned radio station VIVA December 21, Rajoelina announced the city's outstanding debts to its suppliers allegedly amount to 7.7 billion Ariary or approximately 4.32 million USD, causing disruption to services such as garbage collection and access to potable water.

¶4. (U) The Consortium of National Election Observers (CNOE), funded in part by the USG through a National Democratic Institute (NDI) program, dispatched 127 election observers throughout the country. While CNOE acknowledged the election day proceeded calmly, its observers noted the same minor irregularities seen in previous elections, many that could easily be addressed by electoral law reform. Irregularities included persistent administrative problems with voter registration lists, the bias of public media, and candidates' unequal access to resources. A number of independent candidates in the Antananarivo province are filing complaints with

the Supreme Court alleging that while the results registered at
district level collection centers showed them winning by a large
margin in their municipalities, the official results have a TIM
candidate winning.

¶5. (SBU) COMMENT: TIM President Randriasandratriniony's attempts
to characterize the number of independents hailing from TIM as proof
the party is alive and well ring hollow. The fact so many chose to
run as independents suggests TIM's internal problems are far from
being resolved. Post is encouraged by the government's initial
pledges to work with all mayors and will continue to monitor the
handover of power, particularly in Antananarivo. END COMMENT.

MARQUARDT